

CORE Principles of CONflict RESolution

1. Listen Actively

Listening is the most important part of communication. If we do not hear what the other parties are communicating we cannot resolve a conflict. Active listening also includes noticing what the another person is saying with intonation and body language.

2. Think Before Reacting

The tendency in a conflict situation is to react immediately. In emergencies, fast physical reaction can save lives. In workplace conflicts, we may say things without thinking that damage relationships. In order to resolve conflict successfully, it is important to consider possible outcomes.

3. Attack the Problem—NOT each other!

Conflict is very emotional. When emotions are high, sometimes we attack the person on the other side of the problem. What is the problem underlying the emotion? What is the cause, rather than the symptom?

5. Accept Responsibility

Every conflict has many sides. There is enough responsibility for everyone. Attempting to place blame creates resentment and anger. In order to resolve a conflict, we must accept our share of the responsibility and eliminate the concept of blame.

6. Use Direct Communication

With an "I-Message" we express our own wants, needs or concerns to the listener. "I-Messages" are clear and non-threatening ways to express information. Consider the differences in these "I-Messages" and "YOU-Messages".

- I need feedback on my work. [YOU didn't give me feedback.]
- I'm concerned about the project. [YOU don't think I care about the project.]
- I want to be part of the team. [YOU don't want me to be part of the team.]
- I need more information. [YOU don't give me enough information.]

A "YOU-Message" blames or criticizes the listener, suggesting that she or he is at fault.

7. Look for Common Interests

We are taught to verbalize what we want. To resolve conflict successfully we must discover:

- What is really important about the issue in conflict to all parties?
- Why is a particular outcome important to all parties?

8. Focus on the Future

It is important to understand the dynamics of the relationship including the history of the relationship. To resolve the conflicts, we must focus on the future. **What do we want to do differently tomorrow?**

The Process

I. Initiating the Process

1. The session will begin with everyone together in a joint session, during which time the counselor/mediator will explain the process. You will be asked to make a statement regarding the incidents that led to the issues which was brought to the neutrals. Normally, we begin with the person who contacted the neutrals. Each person will have uninterrupted time to speak to the issues from their perspective.

2. During the process the counselor/mediators may meet privately with each of you to discuss specific issues. They will continue these private meetings to assist in identifying interests and generating options for resolving the dispute.

3. The counselor/mediators will receive permission from each side to discuss any comments which have been made in the private meetings. If you give your permission to disclose the information, the counselor/mediators will do so. Otherwise, the comments will remain confidential.

4. At the conclusion of the session, the parties may specify their points of agreement and, with the assistance of the counselor/mediators, draft an agreement. Each party will sign the document. Some agreements which obligate the Department will require a legal review before the parties sign.

5. If no agreement is reached, the parties may decide to end the session, or reconvene at a later date. Sometimes parties may decide they need more information before making a decision or consult with another person. They may re-schedule another session for a time when another person, or additional information, is available.

II. Your Role During the Session

1. Remember that it is most helpful to communicate with the other side by looking at that party when speaking to her/him and acknowledging that you have heard her/his comments. You will be allowed to take notes while the other person is speaking to avoid interrupting.

2. Even when you disagree with her/his position, sit calmly and listen to her/his statements.

3. Try to keep the anxiety level and anger level at a minimum.

Refrain from saying "I don't think we will ever get this resolved," or from hostile body language.

4. You can demonstrate an understanding of the other side's position without agreeing with their position. It is easier to discuss your differences after you have developed trust.

5. Refrain from using the "tough" approach. Remember that both of you are trying to resolve this together. A tough approach could be perceived by the other side as diminishing his/her issues and can impede settlement.

6. If you are the person who contacted the neutrals, be prepared to make a short, straightforward opening statement, discussing what happened in chronological sequence. You should also be prepared to briefly state what you see as the problem. Problems are best stated using an "I" message. "I feel I am not being treated fairly when....." or "I believe I have been discriminated against when....."

7. Each party should avoid phrases that are accusatory in nature. Rather than saying "He is a dictator and a poor manager," it is best to state "It is my perception (or feeling) that he is acting like a dictator when he attempts to control every moment of my day."

III. Resolution Strategy. In preparing for resolution during the session it is useful to consider the following:

1. What are your interests, i.e., what do you really want or need?
2. What do you think the other side really wants or needs? Try to envision how you would react and what you would want if you were in their situation.
3. What is it realistic to ask for?
4. Identify and list as many creative options to resolve your issues as you can. Think of what the other party could do to satisfy your needs, wants and interests, taking into consideration what is feasible.
5. Prioritize the options, allowing room for flexibility.
6. Think of what you could do to satisfy the interests of the other side.
7. If you don't settle this dispute in session, what are your other alternatives?
8. Of all those alternatives, which is the best (and most realistic) one?

9. Estimate what it will COST you if you DO NOT resolve this in session.

10. Be prepared to compare your alternatives with what the other side offers in session and decide which is better, considering time, cost, uncertainty, stress, etc.

11. If you can't get everything you want, think about what you can live with, in order to get resolution now.